



**City of Scottsdale
Tourism Development Commission
McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission
Joint Work Study Session
Minutes**

Approved 9/07/17

Thursday, August 10, 2017
City Hall Kiva Forum
3939 N. Drinkwater Boulevard
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission:

Chairperson Bob Frost, Vice-chair Mike Milillo, Commissioners Steve Dodd, Con Englehorn, Jace McKeighan, Cynthia Wenstrom

ABSENT: Commissioner Bobbie Alpert

PRESENT: Tourism Development Commission:

Chairperson David Scholefield, Vice-chair Linda Dillenbeck, Commissioners Frank Ashmore, Camille Hill, Carl Grupp, Robert McCreary

ABSENT: Commissioner Ken McKenzie

STAFF: Bill Murphy, Community Services Director; Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Karen Churchard, Economic Development Director; Gary Meyer, Senior Project Planner; Erin Walsh, Public Information Officer; Bruce Washburn, City Attorney; Joe Padilla, Deputy City Attorney; Bill Hylan, Senior Assistant City Attorney

GUESTS: Sam Campana, DDCS; Lynne Lagarde, DDCS; John Sather, Swaback Partners; Tom Hennes, Thinc Design

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Frost and Chair Scholefield called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. DESERT DISCOVERY CENTER CONCEPT PRESENTATION

Gary Meyer introduced the project and Sam Campana from the consultant team.

Ms. Campana, representing Desert Discovery Center Scottsdale, gave a presentation on the project including project data details and the organization's mission statement. She explained that the center is now being called Desert EDGE because a similar facility in Barstow, California holds the name Desert Discovery Center. "EDGE" stands for Encounters, Discovery, Global insights, and most of all, Education.

Desert EDGE is proposed to be approximately 50,000 square feet. She noted that 22,000 square feet was previously approved for a different site and the Phase II feasibility study discussed 72,000 square feet. Administration buildings, storage, and overflow parking would be located at an off-site location. Total capital costs including architecture, exhibits, project support, and contingency is expected to be approximately \$61,184,466. Funding is recommended to be a combination of bed tax, preserve tax, private contracting, and private sector donations. There are no new tax recommendations.

Tom Hennes, Thinc Design, discussed the interpretive goals for the project. It is envisioned that Desert EDGE will be a focal point for education, research, and dialogue about human interaction with arid environments as exemplified in the unique Sonoran desert.

John Sather, Swaback Partners, reviewed the architectural goals of the project and the long history behind the Desert Discovery Center. Phase II was focused on feasibility concept and public input. Many members of the public responded with concern about locating the facility at the Gateway.

Mr. Sather said the architectural goals focus on listening to public input, respecting the desert and minimizing the visual impact. He reviewed the architectural typology, the architectural concept of linked desert pavilions, repurposing of the existing equestrian parking area, the overall site plan, and viewsheds. Structures will be designed in a similar style to those located at the existing trailheads, will create a minimal visual impact, and strive to be LEED and net zero designated. Ticketing will be handled through electronic means and there will be a safety zone for bus loading.

Mr. Hennes expanded on the pavilions concept and discussed a partnership with ASU Global Dry lands Institute that was further explain by Duke Reiter with ASU.

Ms. Campana discussed the business plan and operating assumptions. She reviewed the list of upcoming meetings, noting that final reports are available on the City's website, the Desert EDGE website, and hard copies are available at all library locations.

Lynne Lagarde, DDCS, gave the consulting teams legal perspective of the Preserve Ordinance as it relates to Desert EDGE (Desert Discovery Center) project. She said the Ordinance allows for this use in the Preserve citing that the key purposes of the Preserve is to provide public access for educational purposes; that it may contain facilities or improvements for passive recreational activities as determined necessary and appropriate for the City; and that management objectives include providing support and opportunities for people to experience

and enjoy the magnificent mountains and desert. She noted that Art DeCabooter and Bob Cafarella confirmed that the Ordinance language was intended to ensure that this type of facility could be permitted within the Preserve boundaries.

Ms. Lagarde added that the Charter would only be a factor in the process if the proposal was to remove land from the Preserve, which is not the intent. She said that Preserve tax funds can be used because the 2004 ballot language outlines "buying land and constructing improvements thereto".

Commission members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

Ms. Campana explained that Robert Brais will be presenting a business plan during the upcoming City Council work study. Estimated attendance was studied during both the Phase II and Phase III studies and speculation at this point is approximately 306,000 attendees over a period of several years would be a viable number to work with for the business plan. Once the non-profit partner is secured, marketing the Desert EDGE brand will begin immediately and will continue during the construction period. Currently, in partnership with ASU, an international symposium offering 20 international researchers the opportunity to discuss drylands issues, is being considered for the Spring of 2018.

Ms. Campana said that the largest assembly that could be considered for the indoor space is approximately 300 and would fit in the Sonoran Seasons area. Outside seating would allow for approximately two busloads of visitors. There are no large assembly areas. Programming will be done with the idea of attracting repeat visitors. Mr. Sather explained that the goal is to create a one-of-a-kind, world-class institution and offer programs that will attract both locals and tourists.

Mr. Ekblaw noted that Gateway Trailhead had over 200,000 visitors last year, which does not include people entering the Preserve from peripheral areas. Ms. Campana said that neighboring facilities such as WestWord which are in close proximity will help in generating attendance to Desert EDGE. Mr. Hennes said that ConsultEcon typically projects stabilized attendance. A quality new attraction will peak in the first year and attendance will stabilize in subsequent years. Sustainability will be achieved if the organization maintains a strong connection to the community and an ecosystem of support with organizations such as ASU and City Commissions. Mr. Sather noted the projections are based on a collaboration of the in-depth analyses done during both Phase II and Phase III.

Ms. Campana explained that the committee was asked by City Council to provide a menu of funding sources. They recommended "buckets" where funding could come from including Bed Tax, Preserve Tax, and 10% by the private sector.

Chair Frost requested that staff provide an update on the Preserve Fund and how the endowment that the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission recommended for maintenance and operation of the Preserve might be affected by this proposal. Mr. Ekblaw said that an update will be provided prior at the September 7th meeting.

Ms. Campana said that she will make sure that presentations during the individual commission meetings include the cost benefit analysis.

Mr. Ekblaw explained that if the DDC moves forward and the equestrian parking area is repurposed, it would be relocated to another location. Development of a new, enhanced

equestrian facility would take into consideration past experiences and input from the equestrian community. The location being considered for a relocation of the equestrian site is to the immediate north of the existing Gateway parking area. Any relocation will return through a public review process with the Preserve Commission.

Responding to a question about possible location of offsite DDC facilities, Mr. Ekblaw noted that the City-owned land in the WestWorld/Bell Corridor area to the north and south of Bell road was under consideration.

Ms. Campana said that the organization has raised in excess of \$500,000 which includes \$100,000 in-kind commitment from the tourism industry and donations from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC), and the Gila River Indian Community. It is hoped that SRPMIC will be a long-term partner.

Ms. Campana explained that special programs would be limited to 60 per year and any events that happen after dark would require participants to use the off-site parking.

Mr. Sather said that security will primarily consist of security cameras. The buildings can be locked but the area will be left open so as not to restrict animals from passing through.

Mr. Washburn said that he was not prepared to comment on Lynne Lagarde's legal analysis. He will provide counsel to City Council.

Ms. Lagarde indicated that the café is an allowable use because it is an accessory to the principal use.

Chair Frost encouraged forming a partnership with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy.

Mr. Sather said that the public art piece would likely take the form of an interpretive piece related to the desert.

4. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

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